

## BLACKTOWN

STORIES

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*The Sydney Station Stories article series looks at active railway stations around the Sydney region – their history, placement, design, precincts and current services.*

**D**uring the mid-1990s, for reasons I now just cannot recall clearly, I changed trains here in Blacktown on my morning commute from home (Penrith) to university (Liverpool). I think it might have had something to do with taking the opportunity to go for a short(ish) ride on the old 'U boat' intercity electric trains between Penrith and Blacktown, which were then in their career twilight. The line between Blacktown and St Marys had long been justifiably renowned as the one of the speediest sections of track in Australia – flat, straight, and for many years now, no level crossings. U Sets clattered along that section absolutely flat chat, it was great!

Cut to 2023 and I returned to Blacktown (twice!) for the first time in well over 20 years to find a behemoth where the station used to be, and I was immediately struck by the 'oddness' of its set up – unlike your Strathfields, Sutherlands, Lidcombes, what have you, which are junction stations efficiently set up with the tracks diverging beyond the station (and thus saving real estate and making life a little easier for passengers changing trains), Blacktown's junction occurs before the actual station. As you'll read below, circumstances have actually conspired to push the branch line platforms further and further away from the mainline set up. This intrigued me. How did this come to be? Well ...

The intent to extend the original Sydney to Parramatta railway across the Blue Mountains to Bathurst was not to be ignored. Although there was

still at that time doubt that a railway across the mountains could in fact be built, work began in 1858 on an extension towards Penrith to tap the Nepean district. The first portion to open was that from what was then Parramatta Junction (present day Granville) to Blacktown Road, which was proclaimed in the Government Gazette to open from 2 July 1860. The problem was, railway contractor John Gibbons was not predisposed to hand over the line to Railway Commissioner, Captain Ben Hay Martindale, in the absence of Chief Engineer John Whitton, when the time came. Gibbons was arrested, the Courts and the Government became embroiled and although Martindale sought to ensure that Gibbons would assume liability for any post-commissioning defects in the new line, Gibbons was just as staunchly opposed. He wanted an inspection and sign-off from the absent Whitton. Eventually agreement was reached, and the line was duly opened with public trains on 4 July, albeit without the traditional fanfare. At the time, the only intermediate station between Parramatta Junction and Blacktown Road was the new 1860-built Parramatta Station (which is incorporated into the larger station complex in use today). The location of the original (Dog Trap Road) Parramatta Station was, in fact, on what had become the Great Southern Railway, between present-day Granville and Merrylands.

Meanwhile, Blacktown Road Station was renamed simply 'Blacktown' from August 1872, while the 1 December 1864 opening of the Richmond Branch gave the then rather humble location a junction status. Prior to that the station possessed only a crossing loop and a short goods siding. 'Blacktown Road' was the name given the roadway leading to the nearby 'Native Institution' (about as horrible as it sounds) set up by Governor Macquarie, but which had actually been closed down in 1833. For better or worse, the name stuck.





**Left (page 42):** Southern Shorthaul Railroad's G513 is hauling coupled *Mariyung* sets D117/D17 from Lithgow to Kangy Angy as train 7478, Friday 22 September 2023.

**Above:** Looking north along the elevated pedestrian walkways heading to the bus interchanges (on the left) and the Richmond Branch platforms and commuter car park (on the right), Sunday 17 September 2023.

**Below:** On the left, Waratah set A68 is Richmond bound in platform 2 while set A34 is approaching platform 1 with a City and North Shore bound service from the branch. On the far right is a stabled Tangara set. Sunday 17 September 2023.





Looking west from platform 4 taking in platform 3, which is the least used of Blacktown's seven platforms. Platform 3 is primarily used for the OSCAR Central Coast via North Sydney services that terminate at, and commence from Blacktown, along with a small number of T5 services to and from Leppington. Sunday 17 September 2023.



Again, looking west, but on this occasion from Blacktown's platform 5 towards the cavernous overhead concourse, Sunday 17 September 2023.

A number of 'vintage' images decorate the main concourse, including this aerial view of the then new Blacktown station complex from 1995, Sunday 17 September 2023.





The newly opened Richmond Branch was served by a platform opposite the main line platform, on the curved track veering north-west. The duplication of the line from Parramatta to Blacktown in 1886 saw Blacktown remodelled with extra sidings on the branch as well as the additional mainline. Passengers crossing from mainline to branch line services (as the branch service was a shuttle train then), were forced to cross the tracks at the Richmond Road level crossing immediately west of the station, until a footbridge was constructed in 1911.

The quadruplication of 1946 brought even greater change, for the broadly concurrent introduction of wider electric passenger stock forced an easing of the curvature of the branch platforms (a second branch platform had been provided in 1942). The opportunity was taken to again remodel the layout of Blacktown Station, with the branch platforms pushed north to ease the curvature of the tracks serving them, while, due to the quadruplication itself, the physical track junctioning for the Down Richmond Branch was relocated well over a mile east to the immediate Down end of Seven Hills Station, with the Down branch track (now the northernmost of the four lines from Parramatta) crossing over the other lines via a new flyover before reaching Blacktown. The quadruplication was later extended to St Mary's and a new relief track was built off the Down Richmond Branch, running between the main lines and branch lines to essentially bypass the mainline platforms.

Don't fret if this all sounds confusing – it is confusing. Blacktown Station is a case study in 'organically grown track layout'.

The next major remodelling came in 1995 when Blacktown Station itself was effectively levelled and built new. For the most part the existing track work remained unchanged, except that the aforementioned relief road was given its own platform face, becoming the new platform 3 – forcing a renumbering of the pre-existing mainline platforms. Platforms 1 and 2 serve the Richmond Branch, effectively a separate station these days, the relief track is platform 3, while platforms 4-7 are on the four-track mainline. In the void created by pushing the Richmond Branch island platform northwards, a bus interchange was created, while a new concourse and elevated pedestrian walkways were constructed to speed up access/egress not only between the branch and mainline platforms, but also to the bus interchange and car parks, as well as the retail precincts on the south side of the line.

Today Blacktown is one of the busiest stations on the Sydney Trains network and only Central, Redfern and Strathfield possess more platforms. Its primary function is to service the T1 North Shore & Western (Emu Plains/Richmond to Berowra via North Sydney) and T5 Cumberland (Richmond/Schofields to Leppington) lines. NSW TrainLink Blue Mountains services also stop at Blacktown, as does the Central West XPT, although not the 'Bathurst Bullet' *Endeavour* or Broken Hill *Xplorer* services. Blacktown also hosts a

handful of 'layover' H Set OSCAR trains during weekdays, which come in during the morning peak on Central Coast TrainLink services from Gosford and Wyong (via the North Shore), heading out that afternoon along the same route. The weekly *Indian Pacific* (normally in to and out of Sydney every Wednesday) can also be seen at Blacktown – late morning on the Up and mid-afternoon on the Down.

Freight services through Blacktown currently include daily Pacific National (PN) container shuttles between St Marys and Botany, Fletchers Internal Exports' Dubbo-Botany container freight (three times a week in both directions), Qube and Pacific National (PN) services to and from north-western NSW, select PN interstate services, PN grain/flour trains, Southern Shorthaul Railroad (SSR) coal trains between Clarence and export loaders in Newcastle, and the SSR container trains between Kelso and Botany. SSR also, as of December 2023, still locomotive-haul D Set *Marrying* train sets between stabling locations, and many of these movements pass through Blacktown (see photograph, page 42).

Although Blacktown is definitely a commuter's station, it is also handy for tourists who will need to change to a bus here to visit Featherdale Wildlife Park (route 729), Sydney Zoo (723 and 729), portions of the sprawling Western Sydney Parklands (723 and 729), and Raging Waters (a dedicated shuttle summer school holidays shuttle bus). From an observers' point of view, Blacktown is worth visiting to see a sprawling station in action, hosting a good cross-selection of the Sydney Trains and NSW TrainLink fleets. About the only Sydney-based electric trains you won't see here are the older Goninan K Sets – usually. If you have an hour to spare, jump on an interurban V Set (they are now in their twilight years) out to Penrith and back to see the 'race track' in action.

*Next: Dulwich Hill*

### Quick facts

Distance from Sydney Central	34.9 kilometres
Elevation	64 metres above sea level
Opened	4 July 1860
Departures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekday: 223 Up</li> <li>• Weekend: 150 Up</li> </ul>

*With thanks to John Hoyle for his assistance in preparing this article.*



**Waratah set A43 arrives in platform 2 as run 136F from the North Shore en route to Richmond, Friday 22 September 2023.**